



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Badlands National Park

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Badlands News Release

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Badlands National Park Reintroduces Swift Fox

Greg Schroeder, the Swift Fox Reintroduction Coordinator at Badlands National Park announced that the park will begin restoration of the swift fox to the park's prairie ecosystem starting on Saturday, September 13, 2003. The park is inviting all interested members of the general public and media to attend this release of a male/female pair of swift fox. The release will take place at 7:00 pm at the Prairie Winds Overlook near milepost 16 along Highway 240, the Badlands Loop Road.

Thirty swift fox will be released in the north unit of Badlands National Park over three days beginning on September 13, 2003. This reintroduction is the first planned release with further releases scheduled over the next three years with the eventual goal of creating a resident, self-sustaining population. The swift fox that will be released in the park during this reintroduction were captured near Limon, Colorado on August 25 through 27 with the support of the Colorado Division of Wildlife and private landowners. All male/female pairs were captured on private land with the permission of landowners. While awaiting release, the swift fox have been vaccinated for a variety of diseases including rabies, canine distemper and parvovirus. Currently, the swift fox are residing in a quarantine kennel at Badlands National Park until the release date.

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The swift fox (*vulpes velox*) is the smallest and least known member of North American wild canines and is a key species of the short grass and mixed grass prairies of the Great Plains. Historically, this small fox weighing less than five pounds occurred in all or portions of North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas. Swift foxes were abundant throughout much of their range until the late 1800s to the early 1900s.

With European settlement of the plains, swift fox populations declined dramatically. The decline is attributed to factors including conversion of native prairie to agriculture and the associated declines in prey species, unregulated hunting and trapping, rodent control programs and predator control programs aimed at larger carnivores. Swift fox population declines were greatest in their northern range, being extirpated from Canada and North Dakota and remaining in scattered, remnant populations in South Dakota, Nebraska and Montana. The present contiguous range of the swift fox extends from Wyoming south through eastern Colorado to extreme northern Texas. Only small isolated populations exist in South Dakota today. The last sightings of a small resident population near Badlands National Park occurred in 1992.

South Dakota lists the swift fox as a threatened species under state law and is mandated to “manage, protect and restore” the species. The National Park Service Management Policies state that the agency “will maintain as parts of the natural ecosystems of parks, all native plants and animals” and “will strive to restore extirpated native plants and animal species to parks if... the population can be self-perpetuating.” Of the 24 units of the National Park Service located within the historic range of the swift fox, Badlands National Park appears to have the best potential for supporting a self-sustaining population. After soliciting public comments and input, Badlands National Park recently finalized an environmental assessment of the plan to restore the swift fox to the park with a finding of no significant impact.

Working with Badlands National Park in the effort to restore the swift fox to South Dakota are many partners. These include the Turner Endangered Species Fund; South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks; Colorado Division of Wildlife; Wyoming Game and Fish Department; Lower Brule Sioux Tribe; Fort Pierre and Buffalo Gap National Grasslands; South Dakota State University and the USGS Northern Prairie Research Center. The Turner Endangered Species Fund provided important training to park staff on techniques for capturing and handling swift foxes.